

NETWORK

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ALWAYS REMEMBER

Last Post Fund and Royal Oak Burial Park pay tribute to veterans with new memorial

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Last Post Fund B.C. branch members with representatives from Royal Oak Burial Park.



ALWAYS REMEMBER

Last Post Fund and Royal Oak Burial Park pay tribute to veterans with new memorial

By Lisa Johnston

The Last Post Fund's mission is to ensure that no veteran is denied a dignified burial but their scope includes the Unmarked Grave Program, the Lost Veterans Initiative and the Indigenous Veterans Initiative. The B.C. branch has also been hard at work installing a number of memorials over the past few years including its latest project at Royal Oak Burial Park.

It all started two years ago when Gino Simeoni, president of the British Columbia branch of the Last Post Fund, reached out to Lorraine Fracy, Royal Oak's business development manager, about the possibility of installing a memorial in the not-for-profit community-owned cemetery. Located in the heart of Greater Victoria, the cemetery is home to a veterans' section with a Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Cross of Sacrifice but had no other memorial honouring Canada's war and peacekeeping missions.

After assisting with the recent installation of memorials in Burnaby's Forest Lawn Memorial Park (2020) and Surrey's Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery (2021), Simeoni was eager to bring a similar concept to Royal Oak. He started the process by meeting with the cemetery management team and after securing their commitment sought funding from Veterans Affairs Canada. When all approvals were in place, Vancouver-based Dan Bellan Design was then hired to design and build the memorial.

"As Veterans Affairs Canada only participates with funding up to \$25,000 for these projects, it is important to point out the generous contribution made by Royal Oak to bring this memorial to reality," says Simeoni, major (retired), the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Branch with 12 Service

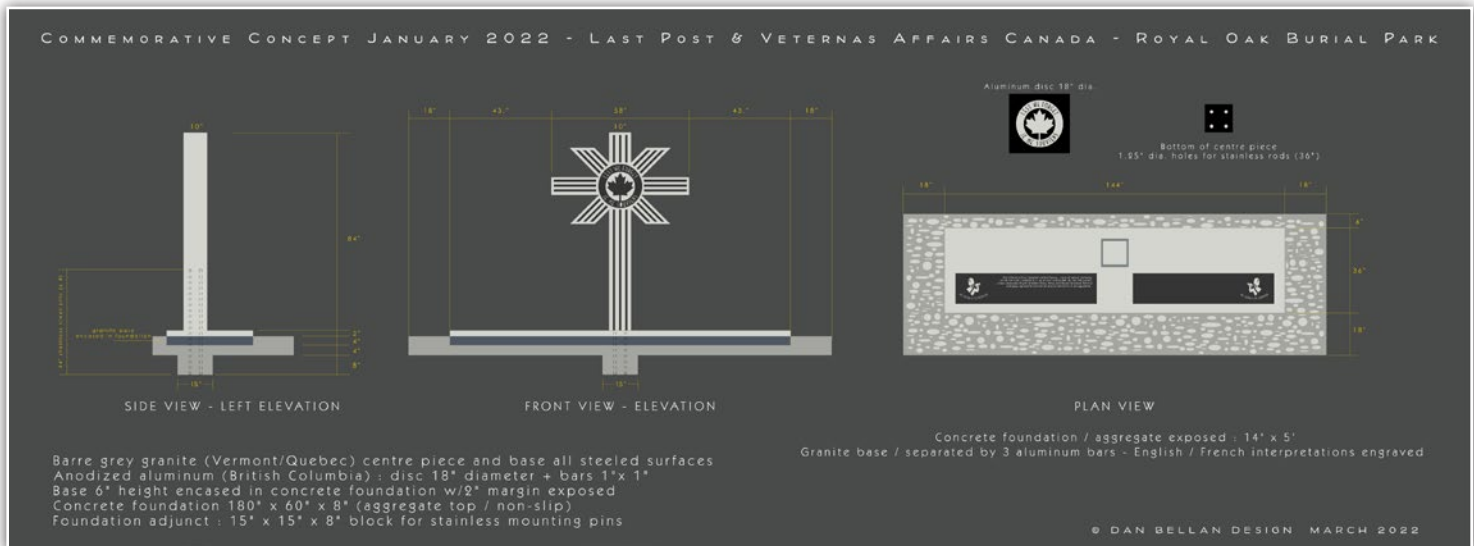


All materials were sourced from the province of B.C.

Battalion in Richmond, B.C. "Much to their credit, the cemetery donated the land, the landscaping and the plants including the preparation for the concrete pad on which the monument sits."

Constructed in an older section of the cemetery, the memorial consists of a marble cross on a sandstone base which boasts the motto of the Last Post Fund. Eight spokes radiate in a compass shape from a central disk near the top of the cross. The stunning work of art was officially unveiled to the public during a ceremony on October 5, 2023 with Royal Oak board members, Last Post Fund representatives and Veterans Affairs dignitaries all in attendance.

"Each of the spokes represents the Canadian Forces' willingness to go anywhere in the world to honour and defend Canada," explains Simeoni. "The three lines leading up from



Conceptual concept of the memorial in January 2022.

the centre are also representations of the three branches of the Canadian Armed Forces: The Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force.”

All materials were sourced from the province of B.C. Largely constructed with unpolished grey granite – a traditional military stone – the bright monument stands in striking contrast to its dark background allowing visitors to reflect on the past, present and future sacrifices of Canadian Forces members. The site backs onto a natural forest and indigenous plantings, including native Oregon grapes, have been incorporated around the memorial to create a beautiful backdrop that will continue to mature through the years.

“The whole purpose of creating these lasting memorials is to make sure we always remember,” says Simeoni. “I know it sounds like a cliché but when I look at the situation nowadays in Canada, we have it pretty good. It’s not just what was done in past generations but what is continuing to be done today. It is important that we say thank you and that we never forget these sacrifices.”

Royal Oak executive director Ilan Highton could not agree more. From the first moment that Simeoni approached the cemetery about building a memorial at the burial park, Highton and his team were on board to support the project.

“It is important to honour our veterans,” says Highton, “and we really liked the fact that it was dedicated to all branches of the military. As we previously did not have a veterans’ memorial in the cemetery, aside from the CWGC Cross of Sacrifice, we were happy to partner with the Last Post Fund on such a powerful and lasting project.”

Unveiling the Last Post Fund memorial also ties in nicely to the centennial celebrations occurring this fall at Royal Oak

Burial Park as the cemetery celebrates 100 years of service to the local community.

“The actual day of our centennial is in November, but we held our 100-year celebration on October 7, just two days after we unveiled the Last Post Fund memorial,” states Highton. “It was a great event that showcased the history of the cemetery. We provided refreshments, live music from the ’20s and ’30s, self-guided and bus tours of the grounds, and a mini-museum that we set up in one of our buildings. We also had the Victoria Genealogical Society onsite to help visitors track their ancestry and provided maps to the graves of the 50 most famous people buried in the cemetery.”

Royal Oak also released their 100-year anniversary book, detailing the history of the cemetery and how it has grown and changed over the years. Spearheaded by Victoria and Saanich councils in the early 1920s after learning Victoria’s Ross Bay Cemetery was nearing full capacity, Royal Oak Burial Park officially opened its gates on November 28, 1923. Soon after, operations slowed considerably when it was determined Ross Bay was only at 60 per cent capacity. The error made for a slow start, but it wasn’t long before Royal Oak established its place in the community. Sitting on one of the highest sites on the Saanich Peninsula, with views of the Juan de Fuca Strait, more than 72,000 people have been buried at Royal Oak and another 93,000 cremated on the 135-acre property. In celebration of 100 years, the new Centennial Ridge section officially opened to casket graves and upright monuments boasting a beautiful view of the entire cemetery.

Whether serving the general public or paying tribute to those who have served in Canada’s Armed Forces, Royal Oak Burial Park is steeped in history. It has even more to celebrate this fall with its 100th anniversary and the installation of the Last Post Fund’s newest memorial dedicated to all who have fought and continue to fight for Canada. **N**

Leading the Way, SHAPING THE FUTURE

OACFP delivers impactful conference

From the moment OACFP members and guests arrived at the Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville, ON, the energy started to build for one of the best attended conferences in recent years. Over 325 participants – delegates, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors – came together for education, camaraderie and fun, all centred around the importance of leadership.

“The theme, Leading the Way, Shaping the Future of the Bereavement Sector, really resonated not only through our speakers but through all our sessions,” said Mark Richardson, OACFP’s new vice president and chair of the conference committee. “I think the panel on the last day summed it up best: everyone in the room – whether a funeral professional, cemeterian or supplier – can serve as a leader in their organization and community.”

According to OACFP executive director Darren Denomme, the event deliberately focused on combining seasoned leaders with up-and-comers. “We hosted a couple of events for younger people but I noticed a few of our bigger companies also sent some people a little further down their chain of managerial command, so they could be exposed to the great networking

opportunities available at the conference. As a result, I think we have set the stage to invigorate some future leaders in the sector which is what we were hoping to do.”

Active participation was encouraged throughout the conference starting with a ceremonial tree planting. Several board members, committee members, past presidents and representatives from the Town of Huntsville and the Huntsville Hospital Auxiliary attended the event at Hutcheson Memorial Cemetery. The OACFP planted two memorial trees, one recognizing its members who have served their communities over the past year and the other recognizing the dedication of the Huntsville Hospital Auxiliary to their own community since 1948. Ninety-eight other trees will soon be planted in three local cemeteries as a thank you to the host community.

“It was a really wonderful start to the conference,” noted Richardson. “Some of us arrived on Sunday evening and on Monday and you could really feel the energy building. Even the mayor spoke on that as did the Huntsville Hospital Auxiliary. They were just so appreciative of what we were doing. We had our largest turnout ever for a tree planting ceremony and that carried through the rest of the week.”





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2023-24 board of directors, left to right: Philippe Lauriault, Shelley Challenger, Caley Ferguson, David Perry, Tim Vreman, John Perrotta, Mark Richardson, Allan Job, Heather Earle and Darren Denomme. Missing from the photo: Carly Lounsbury and Sandra Aguilar.

The positive energy continued the following day with the start of continuing education workshops. First up was the sandbox session, a collaborative group discussion that tackled the bereavement sector's most challenging issues: recruitment and retention; attributes of leadership; organizational and sector silos; and preventing complaints through proactive measures.

"The sandbox was a bit of a carryover from last year," said Richardson. "At last year's conference, we ended with the sandbox where we gathered in groups and talked about concerns. We started this year as a continuation of that, all the while refreshing our minds and coming together to share what we had experienced and learned throughout the year. It was a full room and even spilled over as far as time went because the conversation was so great."

Following comments by the BAO's interim registrar Jim Cassimatis, delegates then continued on their leadership journey with opening keynote Jennifer Botterill. The broadcaster and three-time Olympic gold medallist discussed resiliency and thriving in a changing environment.

"All the sessions were about working together," said Richardson, regarding the range of speakers that graced the stage over the next three days. Jennifer started with a discussion on how a team functions while keeping a positive outlook. From my perspective, that really resonated and continued throughout the entire conference."

Also, on hand this year was Codi Shewan with his Trusted Advisor Training. Lisa Gibson presented on how to become a trusted thought leader through social media before conducting a second workshop on successful communication with the media. Andrea Love broached the topic of trusts while closing keynote Stephen Shedletzky helped leaders listen to and



Genelyn's Vicki Wenzel with Northern Casket's Caley Ferguson, Glen Miller and Blaine Kitchen.



Paul Taylor visits with GFD's Heather Kiteley and Matt Wren.

nurture their voices in others. Throughout it all, MC Minnelle Williams kept the crowd engaged and entertained as they moved from one session to the next.

"One thing I'd like to point out is that it wasn't just leadership within the sector," said Denomme. "We also want our members to become leaders in the community so whenever there are



CFC Supply's Heidi Brown at the Kyber booth.



Rock of Ages' Kelly Conn and Jean-René Audette.



Eckels' Cam Skipper on the trade show floor.

questions regarding bereavement services, burials or funerals, they will be the go-to source. This will add to the longevity of the services we provide.”

There were no shortages of leaders and experts in attendance with the panel discussion featuring the BAO's Jim Cassimatis in addition to Woodlawn Memorial Park's Rebecca Kit, Archdiocese of Toronto Catholic Cemeteries & Funeral Services' John Huys and Mount Pleasant Group's John



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Monahan. Roundtables were also on the agenda with Shelly Challenger and Shari Yearwood (New Haven Funeral Centre) hosting the funeral director's discussion on navigating the complexities of managing multiple decedents. Amanda Gebhardt (Lees+Associates) and Amanda Pinto (Crozier Consulting) led the cemetery roundtable with the topic of cemetery road design.

Even the trade show – which featured 44 vendors, including some new faces – was focused on charting the course of the future.

“Going back to our theme, we had several new vendors who specifically focused on the future,” said Richardson. “For example, Life’s QR demonstrated how a QR code can memorialize a loved one’s life. In addition, STIHL promoted their battery-operated line of equipment as many organizations are looking to reduce their carbon footprint. So, again, it really fit well within shaping the future of the bereavement sector.”

OACFP also incorporated some fun into the three-day event with a sunset beach party, a smartphone mission scavenger hunt and the annual president’s banquet.

“The smartphone scavenger hunt was a team-building exercise,” said Denomme. “We divided the attendees into groups and they had to complete a certain number of missions while taking photos of their progress with their phones.” Antics included finding a funeral director with over 30 years of service, piggybacking hotel staff across the parking lot, and one attendee ending up in the swimming pool fully clothed.

Attendees returned to their best behaviour and their formal attire for the banquet. During the sit-down dinner, the William C. Draimin Award for Volunteerism was presented to Tim Vreman, OACFP’s longtime treasurer, while newly retired Gary Rogerson, Arbor Memorial, received the Award of Merit. David Scott and Robert Palangio were also recognized as life members.

From start to finish, this year’s OACFP conference had it all – full participation from all members right up to the final seminar. When delegates departed, they were excited to take their new leadership skills back to their operations until they meet again in Windsor in 2024.

“I think the feeling of camaraderie this year was something else,” concluded Denomme. “Whether at the sessions or the trade show, instead of encouraging to get people in, we had to encourage to get them to move along to the next sessions. It was heartening to see this sense of community amongst the members.”

“It was an overwhelming success,” adds Richardson. “Everyone participated – cemeterians, funeral directors, suppliers alike – in collectively sharing how we will form the future.” **N**



Luke Colling and Charles Benoualid at the Keeper booth.



Biondan’s Sofia Rossi, Filippo Rossi and Iole Prando.



Pyrox’s Sébastien Litalien with Carrier Mausoleums Construction’s Louis-Philippe and Richard Verrier.



Christopher Hart at the Matthews’ booth.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

WCCA gathers in southern Alberta for a successful conference



WCCA board. Back row, left to right: Lorraine Piller (WCCA administrator), Candace Rogers (AB director), Brett Shenback (MB director) and Kristy LePage (AB director). Front row, left to right: Chris Zerebeski (past president), Ray Bailey (SK director), Soraya Timmerman (vice president), Ken Munday (president), Tiffaney Byle (MB director), Brian Taylor (MB director), Leo Gingras (SK director) and Darrell Dingwall (AB director). Missing: Christine Loewen (SK director) and Larisa Day (supplier director).

Building on its recent growth and momentum, the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA) delivered one of the best attended conferences in years. The annual event happened at the Royal Hotel in Leduc from September 6-8, 2023 where 56 delegates and 19 suppliers enjoyed learning opportunities, knowledge sharing and camaraderie.

“We had a lot of compliments about the conference from those in attendance,” said Ken Munday, who will continue in the role of WCCA president for the next year. “People thought it was well organized, they enjoyed the speakers and the tours, and overall the atmosphere felt like they were attending a large family gathering.”

The event kicked off with a meet-and-greet on the first evening that coincided with the opening of the trade show. Featuring 15 exhibitor booths with experts ranging from bronze manufacturers and columbarium specialists to trust funds and software solutions, the trade show was a buzz of activity. In fact, the combined trade show/seminar space was tighter than ever due to unanticipated demand, something Munday referred to as a good problem to have.

Speaker sessions began the next morning with Ken Fry from Olds College presenting a workshop on detection, recognition and management of pests in trees and shrubs. He was followed by his colleague Jason Pick who continued on the topic of keeping cemeteries looking their best via turf management maintenance levels. Also on hand were AFSA’s Eden Tourangeau to discuss changes to the Alberta Funeral Benefits Program; Casey-Lee Cox presented on the importance of celebrants; Major George Kuhse (retired) discussed the work of the Last Post Fund; Service Alberta’s Deborah Wagar answered questions regarding the regulation of cemeteries; and Miranda Jimmy was joined by a group of women who spoke about indigenous burial sites at both residential schools and hospitals to continue the process of reconciliation in order to support those whose loved ones never came home.

Between the sessions, attendees had plenty of time to stretch their legs, whether visiting the supplier booths or participating in the tour of both Alberta Wilbert Sales and Evergreen Memorial Gardens.

“I really want to call out Alberta Wilbert Sales for everything they did for the association during the conference,” noted

Munday. “Not only did they serve us lunch on the last day, they also shut down production of the plant so we could have a tour. It really opened our eyes to what happens behind the scenes and how burial vaults are made. We then continued on to the cemetery where we toured the cremation garden to see the options available. Attendees could take a ride in the golf carts to see how these vehicles may work in their cemeteries.”

The presidential and finance reports were provided during the annual general meeting in addition to provincial updates. Munday thanked everyone, including WCCA administrator Lorraine Piller, for the support over the year in planning the conference and strengthening the association.

“We have increased membership numbers, reduced costs for the conference to help make it profitable but also to keep attendance costs low, and we are on track to make this a profitable year for the association,” reported Munday during the AGM. “We have also discussed new ideas on how to continue to improve the association.”


One of the topics discussed was the possibility of having a joint conference next year with the Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC) in Winnipeg. To follow up with other members who were not in attendance, a survey was sent out to the entire membership.

“We are waiting for their responses to come in and then will be discussing this as a board. It is an exciting possibility, but we do have concerns, namely the cost to our members.”

For possibly the first time ever, WCCA is operating with a full board, thanks in part to the hard work of its directors in attracting new members. The 2023-24 board has welcomed Kristy LePage, Tiffany Byle, Leo Gingras and Darrell Dingwall. During the AGM, Munday thanked resigning directors, Diane Mennie and Richard Erdmann, for their contributions to the association.

The celebrations continued into the president’s banquet which featured dinner, the entertaining antics of hypnotist Gavin Hooper and the presentation of the Award of Merit to Rick Gosselin from the City of Red Deer.

All in all, this year’s conference marked a number of wins for WCCA and their members that will add to the momentum as they continue building for the future.

Munday concluded, “People left refreshed, well-educated and excited to take everything they have learned back to their various organizations and are looking forward to next year’s conference.” 



Award of Merit recipient Rick Gosselin with nominator Kristy LePage.



Tour of Alberta Wilbert Sales.



Attendees during one of many education sessions.



Lunch at Alberta Wilbert Sales.

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